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ABSTRACT

In fall 2001, the Center for Indian Education at Arizona State University received a federal grant to conduct research on issues of Native language and culture in the classroom. Currently in its first year, the 3-year study focuses on a large cohort of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian candidates in teacher preparation programs to investigate how such programs contribute to the development of effective practices that integrate Native language and culture and positively affect students' learning and social development. In the project's first year, nine researchers are gathering data on 670 Native preservice teachers in 28 teacher education programs to examine the preservice teachers' attitudes toward inclusion of Native language and culture in schooling, how their teacher preparation programs impact these attitudes, and which components of programs evidence their specific interest in the needs of Native students. Case studies will be undertaken in the project's second year, as participants begin their induction year as teachers, situated in their own classrooms. The inductees will be trained in the procedures of teacher research and will gather data related to issues of language, culture, and student achievement in their classrooms and school sites. This study aims to lead the way toward sound models and effective practices in the professional development of Native teachers. (Contains 30 references.) (SV)

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The Native Educators Research Project

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NATIVE EDUCATORS RESEARCH PROJECT

The greatest need in the education of K-12 Native/Tribal students is:

"Incorporating traditional life with the world outside our communities. We need to give our kids examples and correlations between traditional and Western society. They need to realize the need to function in both worlds to be overall successful. You do not have to give up one thing for the other."

"Supportive and understanding teachers who will respect the students and their culture in a school setting."

"More educators who can relate to the backgrounds of our society and children, educators who will not form judgments on others, more Native educators who provide care in a positive manner."

"Learning their own culture."

"Understanding who they are."

"Native teachers and administrators. A teacher who is to teach Native things should be a Native. You have to live it in order to teach it."

These profound statements represent the responses of American Indian pre-service teachers on a questionnaire administered to more than 600 such individuals enrolled in professional development programs aimed at increasing the number of Native teachers in the classrooms of American Indian students. The members of this select group will become the vanguards in a movement to find effective ways of educating Native youth within systems where "all students will be expected to succeed" (Demmert, 2001, p. 3) and wherein the transmission of "Native culture and knowledge" and the development of "the skills and talents

needed to function successfully in modern tribal society and in the multiple societies of the United States and the world" will be inclusively embraced (Charleston, 1994, p. 30). Within such a system, teachers are viewed as the most essential link between the aspects of community and the processes of schooling (Pavel, 1999). Swisher and Tippeconnic (1999) note the interaction between teachers and learners is a basic determinant of whether students will persist or not and add: "We believe that a good teacher is a good teacher, but when there is a good Native teacher, the relationship between Native student and teacher is enhanced" (Swisher & Tippeconnic, 1999, p. 302). The critical nature of this relationship has emerged in the findings of many ethnographic studies in the field of American Indian education over the past 30 years (Bowker, 1993; Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Coburn & Nelson, 1989; Coladarci, 1983; Deyhle, 1992; Dumont & Wax, 1976; Erickson & Mohatt, 1982; Philips, 1983; Swisher, Hoisch, & Pavel, 1991; Wax, Wax, & Dumont, 1964; Wilson, 1991). Representing an enlightened move away from earlier prevailing research models of deficit theory that assumed the locus of academic failure "lies with the indigenous individual or community rather than with other social or structural issues" (Smith, 1999, p. 92), these studies instead focus on differences between home and school cultures and the attendant power relations as they affect school performance—a model congruent with the tenets of a postcolonial research paradigm which accepts and legitimizes Native worldview and values Native epistemological forms (Duran & Duran, 1995, p. 1,6).

Demmert (2001) has noted that a related body of "research on the influences of Native language and cultural programs on academic performance is growing in both volume and importance" (p. 9). Many studies indicate that grounding educational experiences in heritage languages and cultures bears a

strong relationship to healthy identity formation (Hampton, 1995; Kawagley, 1999) and academic success (Barnhardt, 1999; Cleary & Peacock, 1998; Hakuta, 1996; Reyhner, 1990; McCarty, Yamamoto, Watahomigie, & Zepeda, 1997). The incorporation of Native cultures, languages, and values are vital attributes of many Indian education programs today and the professional training of teachers to meet this challenge has become a high priority. This direction has been forged through the efforts of many Native people and has affected federal policy. The 1998 Executive Order on American Indian and Alaska Native Education was influenced by the "Comprehensive Federal Indian Education Policy Statement" that resulted from a two-year process of meetings among tribal leaders, members, and organizations nationwide. The Order articulated the government's commitment to improving academic performance and reducing the dropout rate of American Indian and Alaska Native students and was the impetus for the American Indian Teacher Corp initiative to train more Native teachers and place them in schools with high concentrations of Native students. The Order also called for a comprehensive research agenda to "establish baseline data on academic achievement and retention" and to evaluate "promising practices" and the "role of native language and culture in the development of educational strategies" (Cohen, 2000). The Native Educators Research Project is responsive to this research agenda and is focused on one of the major programmatic initiatives derived from the Executive Order.

The Native Educators Research Project

In the fall of 2001, the Center for Indian Education at Arizona State University was the recipient of a grant from the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI) and the Office of Indian Education (OIE) to conduct

research on issues of Native language and culture in the classroom. The three-year study, which is currently in its first year, focuses on a large cohort of American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian candidates in teacher preparation programs to investigate how such programs contribute to the development of effective practices that integrate language and culture and that positively effect learning and social development of students.

Research Objectives

The present study attempts to explicate the programmatic elements within the diverse teacher preparation programs that either support or influence change in Native pre-service teachers' attitudes toward the inclusion of language and culture in the learning environment and prepare them to effectively situate their teaching within the cultural context of their students' lives. It additionally examines their experiences as teachers in the varying contexts of their schools and classrooms. The results of this study will lead the way toward sound models and effective practices in the professional development of Native teachers.

Research Questions

The key questions guiding the investigation are:

1. What are the attitudes of Native pre-service teachers toward the inclusion of language and culture in schooling?
2. How do teacher preparation programs impact these attitudes?
3. What are the standard components of programs that evidence their specific interest in meeting the needs of Native students?

4. What factors exist in the teaching environments to support or thwart teachers' efforts to incorporate language and culture or situate learning within the local context?
5. Do the teachers perceive that students' learning, academic achievement, and social development are enhanced by the inclusion of language and culture in their classrooms?

Research during the first year of the project is focused by questions one through three. Questions four and five will be addressed in the second and third years of the study.

Conceptual Framework

This study employs a dualistic conceptual framework to examine the interaction of language, culture and schooling in a variety of contexts and settings. It is grounded in a cognitive theory that defines culture as a set of mutually held beliefs, routines, customs, principles of organization, and action, as well as each individual's personal expression of them (Goodenough, 1981, p. 104). This view is predicated on variations according to place and time, acknowledging that culture exists in every context and plays a role in the way that people function.

The companion perspective is based on the concept of *community-based education*, as defined in relationship to indigenous cultures by David Corson (1999). Community-based education is a form of social action within a community framework that extends beyond schools as institutions. It begins with people and their immediate reality, allowing them to be involved in shaping their own futures through schools and other agencies in the community. As part of meaningful educational reform, it focuses on changing oppressive formal

structures. This concept parallels the aims of Indian self-determination and reflects major trends in Indian education policy over the past ten years.

Methodology

This research was designed to accommodate a dual focus necessary to understanding the dynamic interplay between teacher preparation programs and the individual experience and attitudes of the persons enrolled in them. The general framework relies on standard case study methods such as interviews, observations, and surveys (Stake, 1994). It involves the collection and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data from a variety of sources and time periods, proceeding from individuals, to programs, to schools and classrooms. Component studies focused on individuals, groups, and educational settings serve as embedded units of analysis within the central case study (Yin,. 1984). Findings will ascend from initial, specific units of analysis, such as perspectives and experiences of the teachers in training, to progressively more general units of the study, such as outputs of teacher training programs, implementation of theory into practice in schools, and ultimately, student learning and social development.

The researchers. A collaborative team of nine researchers in the field of American Indian education, both Native and non-Native, from six institutions across the country, have been assembled to lead the project. Members of the investigative team serve on faculties at Washington State University, the University of Wisconsin - Milwaukee, the University of Kansas, Northern Arizona University, the University of Alaska – Fairbanks, and Arizona State University. Selected for their known personal commitment to this area of research and their demonstrated scholarly ability, each individual serves as a fully participating co-researcher in guiding the project. Individuals have assumed responsibility for

research sites according to geographic location and prior professional experience with programs or institutions.

The participants and sites. The sample is made up of approximately 670 American Indian, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian pre-service teachers. Over 500 of the participants are enrolled in 28 professional development programs funded by the Office of Indian Education in Wisconsin, Minnesota, North Dakota, South Dakota, North Carolina, Arizona, New Mexico, Washington, Montana, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Idaho. The remaining participants attend universities or postsecondary institutions in Alaska and Hawaii.

Data collection and analysis. Data collection in the first year of the study has been geared toward (1) understanding the demographics of the participants and their attitudes toward the place of Native language and culture in schooling, and (2) general descriptive information about the programs in which they are enrolled. Participants were administered a survey consisting of Likert-scaled and open ended questions to elicit information of the first type, while program information was obtained through guided interviews with directors and the less obtrusive collection of documents such as syllabi, grant proposals and reports (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, p. 1-3). Utilizing NUD-IST and SPSS software programs, the quantitative and qualitative data are presently being catalogued, coded, and entered into the appropriate data bases in preparation for analysis. Qualitative and quantitative data will be integrated as appropriate to produce descriptive statistics related to both individuals and programs (LeCompte & Schensul, 1999, pp. 90-176).

Preliminary Results and Continuation of the Study

This initial body of information will be fully analyzed and reported by October 2002 and will supply the baseline data and context for the case studies to be undertaken in the second year of the project when participants will experience their induction year as teachers, situated in their own classrooms. Also during the second year, investigators will work closely with program directors to train inductees in the procedures of "teacher research" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) so they can begin to gather data related to issues of language and culture and student achievement in their classrooms and school sites. This process is supportive of the immediate research aims of this project and allows it to continue for years into the future.

Educational Importance

In this era of accountability in education, a glance at the statistical portraits presented for American Indian student achievement provokes immense concern. The Native Educators Research Project responds to this concern, suggesting that Native education can be recast as an instrument to break the bonds imposed by centuries of colonization and restructured to create and sustain learning opportunities for Native people and to ultimately rebuild Native families, communities and Indian nations. The results of this study will lead the way toward sound models and effective practices in the professional development of Native teachers and, given that the participants represent tribal nations in all regions of the United States, the results of this project will be highly generalizable.

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